

Hello,

My name is Robin Beauchemin. My son, Riley, is 14 and in 8th grade. We live in Southington, CT and I am writing you in support of House bill 6517.

Imagine going to work every day only to be told by your boss that you're not good enough. You don't understand why you continue to fail because you went through the training program and always try your hardest. What an awful feeling that would be. But you're an adult. And you can choose to move on and find a new job with a better training program that better suits your needs. As a child, you don't have this option. In fact, you only have one option. And that is public school. These children are stuck in a learning environment that was not built for them.

I knew from the time my son started walking that he would have many challenges to face in his life. He was so impulsive at such a young age. And boy did he have a lot of energy. As a proactive mom, I was in constant communication with his pediatrician for advice. She would always tell me that he is still very young, and a boy, and that hopefully as he matured, he would outgrow it. He is now 14, and I can tell you he hasn't outgrown anything!

He breezed through preschool because he thrived off of the structured playtime. When he entered Kindergarten (it was a half day), I voiced my concerns to his teacher. She didn't see any issues, but I would like to point out that it was her very first year of teaching.

In first grade I reached out to the school again. I explained my concerns and how I suspected adhd. Interestingly enough, they had already sent the schools Occupational Therapist in to his classroom to do an "informal" observation. Clearly, they saw it too. At that time, I had asked to have a meeting to discuss a possible 504 plan. They honored my request of a meeting, only to tell me that they didn't feel he was eligible for a 504. My husband and I were not in agreement and brought Riley to the Center for ADHD where he was diagnosed with ADHD (combined type), anxiety in a school setting, Sensory Processing Disorder and Developmental Coordination Disorder. We once again contacted the school for a meeting and with the supporting documentation were awarded a 504 plan for things like "motor breaks" and a "social skills" class. He was also given a half hour per week of Occupational Therapy as there were some concerns over letter reversals, poor spacing and poor handwriting.

Even with the new accommodations, he continued to struggle in 1st and 2nd grade. He was distracting to the class and really struggled to fit in. He would hold himself together in school as best he could and let it ALL out when he got home. I like to refer to this as "the wrath of Riley"!

By third grade, his self-confidence had diminished. We did everything we could as parents, including making the decision to start him on the dreaded adhd stimulant. He also had an outside therapist that he would see once a week. None of this helped. He was still struggling.

Fourth grade didn't prove to be much better. He was still struggling to keep up with things like handwriting, spelling, social skills and trying to get him to sit and read a book was near impossible. I believe it was at this time that he was given a computer as his handwriting was not legible and also his OT services were removed-we were not in agreement with this. On his end of year report card the teacher wrote a note saying "Riley should work on reading fluency over the summer".

By fifth grade, he was only able to do half days for most of the year. He was having a very hard time paying attention, he was distracting to the entire class and just when we thought his self-esteem couldn't get any worse, he proved us wrong. He hated everything about school. We were losing our son right before our eyes.

Middle School..... A fresh start! Or so we thought. Somehow, he managed to pull off honor roll in his first trimester. My husband and I were finally breathing a breath of fresh air! But of course, he would always start off strong, because he is smart. And then as the year went on, he'd start slipping. I was in constant contact with his guidance counselor regarding my concerns. Afterall, no parent wants their kid to be the one that distracts the entire class. They offered little support. Things like "take a walk" I'm sorry but if a walk could solve all of the world's problems, we'd all be in a better place.

We decided to call another meeting to revise his 504 but this time, we paid his outside psychologist to come with us. Dr Reynold's was a Rockstar in that meeting! He advocated for Riley, gave the school some tips on how to help him through his day and agreed with the teachers in the room that Riley truly wants to do well, but something was really holding him back. Unfortunately, none of this worked.

In 7th grade we watched our son struggle even more to fit in with peers. He was miserable and suffered from debilitating anxiety. Again, taking a walk wasn't working. I remember writing an email to his teachers explaining how fragile his mental state was, given his anxiety and low self-esteem. As a parent of a 12-year-old child who was turning 13 in a few weeks, I was terrified to send him to school because that was the one place where he didn't feel like he fit in. He knew he was smart but something was holding him back and none of us understood. Add to that the comments made by one of his teachers where he referenced Riley being "struck by a meteor", in front of all of his peers at a time where everything was wrong in his life. This is when he started refusing to go to school. I had to rearrange my days which turned into weeks to stay home with him. This is one of the darkest parts of our lives as a family. We all walked on egg shells. I scrambled trying to figure out exactly what was going on with our son who up until about 1st grade, was the happiest kid on earth. Something about school was taking him away from us, and I was determined to find out what it was. I was making a grocery list and he wrote about 5 items on my list. At 13, he had atrocious handwriting, poor spelling and letter reversals. I was appalled. How on earth has my 13-year-old son made it this far?! How has no one noticed these spelling errors, poor handwriting and letter reversals?! We called our umpteenth meeting with the school. At this point, I suspected that he was struggling not because of his adhd, but because he also had dyslexia and dysgraphia. I wrote a very detailed letter with supporting writing samples from my son and asked that he be tested for both, dyslexia and dysgraphia. The district FINALLY agreed to some testing. After our meeting, the school Psychologist met with our son and said "I don't think you have dyslexia or dysgraphia, I really think it is "JUST" your adhd." Then, covid hit...

During the summer between 7th and 8th grade, I was contacted by the school asking if it would be ok to start testing Riley so that we had answers when the school year started. Of course, I agreed without hesitation, I feel like we had been waiting his whole life for this moment.

A PPT was called in the beginning of 8th grade. It had been determined that Riley struggled with Executive Function and reading comprehension. He was offered a learning strategies class and of course, given a computer to help with spelling and handwriting and we were assured he had a "strong para" in his Language Arts class. We hung up from our virtual PPT and hired an advocate. I am still wondering how a computer is a sufficient tool to help a child with a "reading comprehension" problem.

At that time, Riley could no longer handle physically going to school and opted to move to remote learning.

After reviewing his school history, report cards and teacher reports with our advocate, we were all in agreement that he should have a complete neuropsychology exam to rule out dyslexia and dysgraphia. In the middle of a pandemic, my husband and I arranged for childcare for our other two children, made a payment of \$4,300.00 and drove to Ipswich, MA to have Riley formally evaluated.

I will never in my life forget the feeling when the doctor sat us down to tell us that our son did in fact have dyslexia and dysgraphia. I was heartbroken. How could I have missed this? How could the school have missed this? Furthermore, she explained how the delay in diagnosis is the root cause of his anxiety and depression. It became clear to me that all of this time we had been focusing on his adhd and the reason we never had success in treating it is because that wasn't the problem. The problem was that our 8th grade son was learning at a 5th grade level. And yet somehow the school says he is on grade level and that his reading level is where it should be.

This is wrong. This has ruined my son's childhood, something he can never get back. His memories of Elementary School are of having no friends, always getting yelled at for not being good enough, always being the "bad kid". When in reality, he was doing all he could to avoid the work because he didn't understand it. Instead of trying to find the problem, he was given a band aid over and over again. All of my concerns were swept under the rug by the school and we were never offered a PPT.

A child with ADHD has a 25-35% higher chance of also having dyslexia. On top of that, if you have a family member with dyslexia (which we do), it's an even higher chance. This was never considered by the district. They set him up to repeatedly fail.

School, the place you send your child to learn. The place you hope they will find their best friends. A place that you expect will help set your child up for success, has ruined my child.

Our schools need early detection of dyslexia. Our schools need better assessments. Our schools need to look at a child's family history. And if accommodations or modifications are given and are not working, our schools need to keep looking.

If we didn't have the money to send our son for a neuropsychology exam, our dyslexic child would still be sitting in a classroom with a computer, a strong para and a learning strategies class. This system is failing us and it's failing our children. The financial and emotional toll this has taken on our entire family is inexcusable. Please consider implementing earlier and effective assessments, a look at family history and more training for our teachers. These children are our future and well worth the investment.